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October 15, 1964

Mr. Nikita S. Krushchev
Moscow
U.S.S.R.

Dear Mr. Khrushchev:

The period of your leadership of the Soviet Union will be noted by historians as that of a man dedicated to peace. I hope sincerely that the period of your retirement will be healthful and happy, one in which you can look backward with satisfaction and the feeling that the world is a better place because of things you did, and forward to a happier and more peaceful world because of changes you wrought in the course of events.

I hope also that, without responsibilities of state, you may find time to answer this letter. In 1959 I wrote you after observing your exchange that year with Mr. Nixon at the American exhibit in Moscow. At that time I suggested the peaceful competition of which you both spoke should be advanced from the status of attractive phrases by politicians into a reality that could benefit all. Specifically, I challenged you to peaceful competition in poultry husbandry, hoping that getting to know each other better and perhaps helping each other would be beneficial. I never received an answer, although I was assured by your Embassy in Washington that both it and Mr. Menshikovich had replied. I was honored by the Embassy's suggestion that your family might accept an invitation to visit our farm, and it appears this was planned to occur while you were with Mr. Eisenhower at Camp David, which is not far from here. This visit, I regret, didn't happen.

Since then, it would seem that my suggestion for peaceful poultry competition has been accepted, and I hope there are ways in which our poultry people can and have helped yours.

As you have just had a change in your life, so also have I had a change in mine. Before becoming a farmer, I was a writer. Now, finding it no longer possible to farm, I have been seeking to return to writing. One article in which my agent was unable to interest any editor had to do with you and Cuba. My analysis has not been suggested in anything I have heard or seen anywhere, and I am writing you hoping you will be kind enough to affirm or deny it and perhaps, if I am correct, to expand on it for me.

It is and was my belief that, as you saw things in mid-1962, events and the policies of the United States Government convinced you that, unless they were changed, you would soon face two impossible choices: Either you would have to go to war to defend Cuba, which you had guaranteed to protect, or you would have been publicly and dishonorably forced to break your pledge with the most serious consequences resulting. Neither of these possibilities was acceptable to you and your government, nor was the state of world affairs. Hence, you had to seek, and eventually create, an acceptable alternative.

Conventional armaments supplied the Cuban government could help it protect itself against dissidents but, against the military might of the United States, would have had no more effect than the breaking of wind into a hurricane.

Your problem, in short, was to make President Kennedy and the United States Government understand the situation as you saw it and your position with regard not only to Cuba but to world affairs generally. Mr. Kennedy had to be made to understand that the world was on the edge of nuclear self-destruction unless policies were changed. With diplomacy having failed, how could you accomplish this?

Only by making Mr. Kennedy face the same kind of a dilemma you faced.

So far as the rest of the world was concerned, at that moment the Soviet Union was ringed with United States missiles, presumably nuclear-armed. There was no secret about this. The world also knew that, in the face of this nuclear-missile encirclement, the Soviet Union had engaged in no aggressive policies against those countries which harbored these missiles aimed at the Soviet Union. If not the people of the United States, the peoples of most of the rest of the world understood that the United States gave every indication of planning to invade Cuba, and most peoples, if not those of the United States, would have considered this aggression. From your point of view, these were two real situations working for your benefit.

How, then, to effect a change in the policies of the United States? How to avoid the possibility of the rapidly approaching military confrontation over Cuba, and the ever-present horror it could escalate into a nuclear confrontation? And how to reverse policies which could lead to other similar situations elsewhere? How to direct the thinking of all governments into processes that could lead to a reduction rather than an increase in tensions?

The only way in which this could be accomplished was to present Mr. Kennedy with the same dilemma and make him choose between its horns.

This you could accomplish in only one way: By making him realize that you were determined to keep your promises to Cuba and by making him understand that the United States could also be devastated if this came to pass.

The most dramatic and perhaps the only means by which this could be accomplished was to install nuclear-capable missiles in Cuba and to see to it that the United States knew they were there. Then Mr. Kennedy faced the same situation you faced, for example, with respect to Turkey. Then, if not imme-

diately, soon he would see and understand the true state of world affairs as you saw them, perhaps even more shockingly because neither Mr. Kennedy nor the people of the United States had ever faced such a threat.

Once the United States knew there were missiles so close, its choices were limited. It could ignore this threat, which you could safely assume it would not do; it could go to war immediately, which certainly drove home the critical situation wrought by its Cuban policy, among others; or it could seek alternative solutions. Deciding between war and negotiation, Mr. Kennedy really had no choice. You were prepared for this, for the installation of your missiles in Cuba was not essential to the defense of the Soviet Union. You could strike all necessary targets with your larger missiles located within your own borders. You could also withdraw the Cuban missiles without endangering the security of your country and thus give President Kennedy what he could take to be a victory. As a practical politician, he knew that you, too, had to have your quid pro quo, and you knew exactly what you wanted - guarantees for Cuba.

When Mr. Kennedy seemed to hesitate in accepting this deal, you sweetened it a little for him by proposing a less attractive alternative. This hastened his acceptance of the solution and proposal you had made immediately - the one you really wanted to begin with.

Hence, you and Mr. Kennedy both had "victories" and the most pressing single threat to peace was eliminated. You removed your missiles which you really didn't need in Cuba anyway, giving Mr. Kennedy something he could represent to his people as a great victory, and Mr. Kennedy gave you the assurances you sought for Cuba, giving you what you wanted.

Meanwhile, the entire world had been forced to think in very real terms about the consequences of national policies that endangered the whole of mankind. Nobody wanted the repetition of such a confrontation over any issue. And everyone suddenly realized that there were broad fields of possible agreement, and that the reaching of any agreement on any major issue was a boon to the world.

It is my belief that at a certain point you wanted the United States Government to "discover" the missiles in Cuba and helped it to do so, perhaps by the deliberate "planting" of the knowledge with Senator Keating. It is also my belief that the reconnaissance planes were not interfered with in any way until they had accomplished your purpose - confirmation of the installation of the missiles. It is likewise my belief that when one was shot down, first the capability to do so was established and, additionally, the willingness to act vigorously was also unequivocally demonstrated. This was but a little more pressure to hasten acceptance of your pre-prepared proposal, which had something in it for everybody and was a solution satisfactory to all.

It is also my belief, and this is not an essential factor in my analysis, that those missiles were never armed. It is a point on which I am curious.

Without doubt, as I see it, the entire course of world events and thinking changed with the creation and solution of what in this country is known as "The Cuban Missile Crisis". One example is the signing of the limited nuclear test ban. I am persuaded you calculated such changes would flow from the crisis you precipitated.

This is a summary of the analysis I made at the time, in October 1962. There are other details, and perhaps in some details I am in error. But I do hope that you will find the time and disposition to answer this letter and to either affirm or deny what I have said. I think you owe it to history to allow the truth, if this is the truth, to be known.

As I have said, I want to write about this. I realize that within his lifetime a statesman and his government have to contend with problems with which perhaps writers do not concern themselves. I commit myself to abide by any restriction you would care to impose on your answer. Also, I want you to know that I would not do or say anything about your answer until after the United States election.

If I am, as I believe, correct in this analysis, I must first extend to you my thanks and then my unlimited praise for an act of great courage and incomparable genius. The world will be forever in your debt for it. Without it there might today be no world as we know it.

Sincerely yours,

Harold Weisberg